

Sri Lanka Development Forum 2005

Civil Society Statement



The Government has convened the Sri Lanka Development Forum on 16th and 17th May 2005 in Kandy to discuss the 'Rebuilding Sri Lanka: Post-Tsunami Action Plan' that is supposed to be published on 15th May 2005. The World Bank, IMF, Asian Development Bank and all UN Agencies, as well as the Japanese, American, British and many other Bilateral Donors¹, will be present.

From the non-governmental sector, it is understood that the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies, World Vision, Oxfam GB, Sewalanka and Sarvodaya have been invited to attend.

Two hundred people's organisations present a united front

The organisations endorsing this statement represent fish worker collectives, farmer groups, women's organisations, trade unions, plantation worker organisations, NGOs, human rights organisations, lawyers' groups, academics, scientists, clergy and others from across the country. While we have not been invited to provide input to the Development Forum, **we take this opportunity to present our collective position in the hope that this may open avenues for further dialogue.** However, the current climate of repression of dissenting voices does not bode well.

We welcome the Government's decision to take responsibility for the elaboration of an action plan for rebuilding after the tsunami and for the coordination of the numerous agencies involved. We also strongly support the guiding principles they have identified of **responding to local needs and priorities, without discrimination, in a transparent and accountable manner, through consultation and the empowerment of communities and their organisations.** However, we see that in practice almost the complete opposite is happening.

Serious problems with the current plans and processes

After nearly 5 months, hundreds of thousands of people affected by the tsunami are still living in the most desperate circumstances amidst complete uncertainty about their future. **Relief is being dumped hurriedly**, without proper consideration of their needs and desires or of the problems of poverty and in some cases conflict in which they were living even before the disaster. The affected people are being pushed into positions of passive, subservient receivers, who begin to compete with each other to get whatever possible, while the unaffected people, including many who have lived in displaced camps and suffered equal distress for up to 15 years because of the war are ignored.

Rebuilding policies are being imposed without dialogue. Decisions are being made by an extra-governmental body TAFREN composed entirely of big business leaders with vested interests in the tourist and construction industries, who are completely unable to represent the interests of the affected communities and who have no professional experience of dealing with disasters. Policies and plans developed by this body are not known by the affected people, and in many cases are not even known by the local government officials.

The action plan is **highly biased towards infrastructure construction**, including highways, large ports and modern townships, under the banner of 'fulfilling the dreams of a modern society'. Officials have also announced that they will be including their previous plans for infrastructure development in the country, including the Norochcholai Power Plant and the Upper Kotmale Dam. Almost no attention is given to how

¹ While we repeat the widely-used term 'Donor', most should rather be called 'Lenders'.

the affected people can rebuild their lives and livelihoods rather than just their physical assets. There are social, psychological, environmental and other problems that must also be addressed urgently.

The plan is also **being used to push through structural reforms in the national economy**, including attempts to reduce labour protection, privatise electricity and water, and sell off other national resources such as the Eppawela Phosphate Deposit.



These **old neo-liberal strategies for transforming the country into a haven for export-oriented business** using the people's money to build infrastructure for the businesses to use have been tried in Sri Lanka for three decades and have only served to further marginalise people by pushing them off their land and out of their livelihoods. The only export businesses that have survived here have been the tea plantations and the garment factories, both built on the basis of very poorly paid and badly treated, mostly women workers. This strategy has been strongly resisted by people in Sri Lanka for years and **it was completely rejected by the people in the last election only a year ago**.

Government must act to bring in the people

Given our very serious concerns, we ask that the Government take action to ensure that mechanisms are immediately established to put into practice the principles described above. **The big business taskforce TAFREN must be disbanded and replaced with a people's planning commission** with representatives of all affected communities and their organisations, and with appropriate experts with experience of social, psychological and environmental as well as physical rehabilitation. The bill formally establishing TAFREN as an Authority to coordinate the development and implementation of rebuilding plans over the next 3 to 5 years, which it is reported is being discussed in Cabinet this week, must not be passed until these essential changes are made.

The Government must **make accessible full information on the resources received and pledged for rebuilding, on the plans and policies agreed, and on the entitlements therefore due to the people** in all government offices in Sinhala and Tamil. This must include full disclosure of the texts of all agreements between Government and donors and between Government and private contractors. The Government must ensure that all officials are fully aware and able to respond to enquiries from people. The Government must also **establish an appropriate complaints procedure** to address grievances that may arise.

The Government must **abandon all attempts to restrict people's rights of access to land**. They should commission a survey by independent scientists to present proposals for the protection of people from possible future disasters. The Government's decision to allow tourist hotels to remain on the beaches demonstrates that the solution need not be to move people away from the coast. Where resettlement is necessary, this must only be done after full consultation with the affected communities on the basis of full information about the real threats and the options available. The coast belongs to the fishing communities. **Buffer Zones, Tourism Zones and High Security Zones that restrict their rights to access their lands and to pursue their livelihoods must be removed**.

Donors must live up to their promises

We remind the Donors that the whole world is watching them. They must take responsibility for **ensuring that the principles of participation that they espouse are actually put into practice, as they have now given massive loans and grants without any evidence of consultation with the people.** They should support the Government in engaging in dialogue with the affected people and in establishing mechanisms for bringing the people into the planning and implementation of rebuilding work. They must take the initiative to disseminate the full details of the resources they are providing and the conditions under which they provide them, in Sinhala and Tamil.

Where the Donors are responsible for infrastructure projects, they must pay heed to their previous experiences in Sri Lanka and the **social and environmental problems** that have emerged from poorly planned projects.



They should **reconsider offering loans at all** in this situation where the Government and the people of Sri Lanka are already labouring under a huge debt burden, and where there are very few possibilities for generating the resources for paying these loans back, other than by taking yet more loans or by cutting back on essential social services.

International NGOs must set the example

We ask international NGOs to set an example for Government and Donors to follow. INGOs must take the responsibility to **strengthen people and their organisations and bring them into both practical programmes and policy debates**, recognising that they have unique knowledge and abilities that cannot be replaced by outsiders.

They should work with their supporters who have so generously contributed resources for the affected people, to help them to understand that **short-term time targets for disbursing money and disregarding communities living in some cases only metres away** in equally dire conditions are totally counterproductive and can actually lead to new conflicts. In particular, consideration must be given to the plight of the communities displaced by the war as well as those displaced by the tsunami.

INGOs must **remember that their role is not simply to act as contractors**, implementing Government or Donor policies and plans, but is also to hold Government and Donors accountable. They themselves must establish mechanisms for ensuring that they are accountable to the affected communities as well as to their supporters.

Call for a people's process

We reaffirm our belief that the very serious problems that remain to be solved must and can only be addressed through a people's process that recognises that **all resources pledged in the name of the affected people genuinely belong to them** and must be used in the way that they see fit.

We urge all parties to **contact us for further discussions** on how this could be implemented. Correspondence may be directed by email to monlar@sltnet.lk. Telephone enquiries may be made to 011 2865534 or 011 4407663.



Signed by:

1. Agricultural and Rural Workers' Development Society, Nuwara Eliya
2. Akuna Newspaper, Colombo
3. All Ceylon Fishermen Union, Colombo
4. All Ceylon United Workers' Congress, Nawalapitiya
5. Alliance for the Protection of National Resources and Human Rights, Colombo
6. Ampara District Fisheries Solidarity, Ampara
7. Anuradhapura District Farmers Assembly, Anuradhapura
8. Arising Sun Community Development Organisation, Nuwara Eliya
9. Arunodaye Parisarikayo, Gampaha
10. Centre for Family Services, Kurunegala
11. Centre for Social Concern, Hatton
12. Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo
13. Ceylon Plantation Workers' Union, Hatton
14. Civil Forum, Hatton
15. Commercial and Industrial Workers Union, Colombo
16. Community Development Centre, Colombo
17. Community Education Centre, Malabe
18. Community Resources Development Centre, Dambulla
19. Cooperatives, Corporations and Mercantile Union, Colombo
20. Christian Workers' Fellowship, Hatton
21. Dabindu Collective, Gampaha
22. Democratic Leftist Front, Colombo
23. Devasarana Development Centre, Kurunegala
24. Diyasa Group, Colombo
25. Eastern United Women's Organisation, Trincomalee
26. Education and Cultural Forum, Kurunegala
27. Federation of Media Employees' Trade Union, Colombo
28. Franciscan Reverend Sisters, Polonnaruwa
29. Free Media Movement, Colombo
30. Free Trade Zone Workers' Union, Colombo
31. Gami Sevana, Kandy
32. Gemi Kantha Peramuna, Gampaha
33. Government Drivers' Union, Colombo
34. Government Office Workers' Union, Colombo
35. Government Printers' Union, Colombo
36. Government United Federation of Labour, Colombo
37. Haraya Newspaper, Colombo
38. Health Services United Telephone Operators' Union, Colombo
39. Hiru Group, Colombo
40. Hiru Newspaper, Colombo
41. Home for Human Rights, Colombo
42. Human Development Institute, Kurunegala
43. Human Development Organisation, Kandy
44. Human Education Aid Relief Trust of Society, Nuwara Eliya
45. Independent Cooperators Collective, Colombo
46. INFORM, Colombo
47. Institute of Social Development, Kandy
48. Jaffna District Fisheries Cooperative Society, Jaffna
49. Janawaboda Kendraya, Negombo
50. Kalmunai Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum, Kalmunai
51. Kalutara District Farmers Assembly, Kalutara
52. Kalutara District Fisheries Solidarity, Kalutara
53. Kantha Diripayasa, Gampaha
54. Kegalle District Women's Cooperative Committee, Kegalle
55. Kithudana Pubuduwa, Gampaha
56. Kotagala Samuga Sevai Mandram, Nuwara Eliya
57. Lanka Academic Forum, Colombo
58. Lanka Teachers' Society, Colombo
59. Lawyers for Human Rights and Development, Colombo
60. Leo Marga Ashram, Bandarawela
61. Mathiyugam, Nuwara Eliya
62. Manawa Himikam Payasa, Gampaha
63. Mannar District Fisheries Cooperative Society, Mannar
64. Matale District Farmers Assembly, Matale
65. Matale District Savisthri Women's Organisation, Matale
66. Matara District Farmers Assembly, Matara
67. Medical Laboratory Technicians' Union, Colombo
68. Moneragala District Farmers Assembly, Moneragala
69. Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform, Colombo
70. Movement for the Defence of Democratic Rights, Colombo
71. Movement for the Protection of Indigenous Seeds, Eppawela
72. Movement to Empower Women in the Plantations, Bandarawela
73. Muguna Development Foundation, Mahiyanganaya
74. Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum, Colombo
75. Nachchaduwa Fisheries Cooperative Society, Anuradhapura
76. Nandana Marasinghe Memorial Foundation, Colombo
77. National Farmers' Assembly, Colombo
78. National Fisheries Solidarity, Negombo
79. National Teachers' Union, Colombo
80. National Union of Workers, Hatton
81. Navayuga Social Development Forum, Nuwara Eliya
82. Nawamaga Foundation, Moratuwa
83. Negombo Lagoon United Fisheries Organisation, Negombo

84. New Leftist Movement, Colombo
85. NGO Forum, Hatton
86. Nirmani Centre, Gampaha
87. Organisation for the Protection of Community Resources, Moneragala
88. Organisation for the Protection of Human Resources and Environment, Hambantota
89. Organisation for the Protection of Human Freedom and Environment, Mahiyanganaya
90. Organisation for the Protection of Legal Services and Human Rights, Hambantota
91. Parakrama Farmers' Organisation, Mahiyanganaya
92. Participatory Action and Learning Methodology, Nuwara Eliya
93. Pasesa, Kandy
94. Peasant Information Centre, Kurunegala
95. Penn Wimosana Gnanodayam, Hatton
96. People's Cultural Collective, Negombo
97. Plantation Rural Education and Development Organisation, Kandy
98. Plantation Sector Social Forum, Kandy
99. Plantation Women Development Foundation, Nuwara Eliya
100. Plantation Workers' Service Centre, Nuwara Eliya
101. Praja Shakthi Development Foundation, Puttalam
102. Praja Shakthi Forum, Puttalam
103. Praja Vimukthi Forum, Kurunegala
104. Progress Union, Colombo
105. Prosperity of Workers Employed in Rural Sector, Badulla
106. Provincial Public Clerical Services Union, Colombo
107. Pudiya Samadharmam, Colombo
108. Puttalam District Farmers' Assembly, Puttalam
109. Puttalam District Fisheries Solidarity, Puttalam
110. Railway Labourers' Unity, Colombo
111. Rajarata Jana Prabodnia Foundation, Anuradhapura
112. Ravaya Newspaper, Colombo
113. Rekawa Development Foundation, Hambantota
114. Research Centre for Interethnic Peace, Colombo
115. Ruhunu Community Development Centre,
116. Ruhunu Rural Women's Organisation, Hambantota
117. Ruhunu Shakthi Organisation, Hambantota
118. Rural Community Development Organisation, Anuradhapura
119. Rural Women's Organisation, Mahiyanganaya
120. Ruwanpura Farmers' Voice, Ratnapura
121. Sarana Foundation, Hambantota
122. Satyodaya, Kandy
123. Savisthri, Colombo
124. Shramabimani Centre, Negombo
125. Social Economic Training Institute Kandy, Kandy
126. Social Welfare Mandram, Nuwara Eliya
127. Society for Welfare, Education and Awareness Training, Nuwara Eliya
128. Southern Fisheries Organisation, Galle
129. Southern Fisheries Organisation, Hambantota
130. Southern Fisheries Organisation, Matara
131. Sri Lanka Janaraja Health Services Union, Colombo
132. Sri Lanka Jathika Peace Development Society, Badulla
133. Sri Lanka Pugwash Group, Colombo
134. Sri Lanka United Agro Society, Kalutara
135. Sri Lanka Working Journalists' Forum, Colombo
136. Sri Vimukthi Women Fisheries Organisation, Negombo
137. Suriya Women's Development Centre, Batticaloa
138. Third Eye Local Knowledge and Skills Activists Group, Batticaloa
139. Thothenna, Puttalam
140. Thulana, Kelaniya
141. Trade Union Centre for the Right to Rebuild the Nation, Colombo
142. Trincomalee District Fisheries Cooperative Society, Trincomalee
143. Udapamunuwa Women's Organisation, Moneragala
144. United Federation of Labour, Colombo
145. United Mine Workers' Union, Colombo
146. United Plantations, Dickoya
147. United Plantation Action, Hatton
148. United Socialist Party, Colombo
149. United Welfare Organisation, Nawalapitiya
150. Upcountry Workers' Information Development Foundation, Nuwara Eliya
151. Uva Community Development Centre, Badulla
152. Uva Farmers' Development Foundation, Badulla
153. Uva Human Development Foundation, Badulla
154. Uva Shakthi, Badulla
155. Uva Wellassa Women Farmers' Organisation, Moneragala
156. Uwagewewa Beneficiaries Organisation, Hambantota
157. Vanni Community Development Foundation, Vavuniya
158. Vidhavi Cultural Centre, Colombo
159. Vikalpanai Women's Organisation, Colombo
160. Vimukthi Media Forum, Colombo
161. Wellassa Development Foundation, Moneragala
162. Wilpotha Women's Savings Scheme, Chilaw
163. Women and Media Collective, Colombo
164. Women's Alliance for Peace and Democracy, Colombo
165. Women's Centre, Gampaha
166. Women's Development Foundation, Kurunegala
167. Women's Development Centre, Kandy
168. Workers' Development Centre, Nuwara Eliya
169. Workers' Development Society, Bandarawela
170. X Group, Colombo
171. Young Environmentalists' Forum, Matara

Supported by:

1. 50 Years Is Enough: U.S. Network for Global Economic Justice, USA
2. Advancing Public Interest Trust, Bangladesh
3. All Nepal National Free Students Union, Nepal
4. All Nepal Women Association, Nepal
5. Angikar, Bangladesh
6. Bangladesh Krishok Federation, Bangladesh
7. BanglaPraxis, Bangladesh
8. Center for Economic Justice, South Africa
9. Centre for Research and Action on Development, Bangladesh
10. Coastal Development Partnership, Bangladesh
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16. Global Justice Ecology Project, USA
17. Global Women's Strike, International
18. Hivos, Netherlands
19. Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong
20. Intermediate Technology Development Group, South Asia
21. International Movement Against all forms of Discrimination and Racism, International
22. Jubilee Coalition, South Africa
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30. National Fishworkers' Forum, India
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32. One Vote Per Person, USA
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38. Second Chance Foundation, USA
39. Solidarity Africa Network in Action, Kenya
40. Solomon Asch Center for Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict, USA
41. South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication, International
42. Suburban Philadelphia Greens, USA
43. Voice of Dalit International, UK
44. Women's Welfare Society, Nepal
45. World Forum of Fisher People, International
46. XminusY Solidarity Fund, Netherlands

